

**RC21 Conference**  
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**Urban agglomerations and "city region"  
formation in South Africa: who are our  
truly competitive global bets?**

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# Global City Regions

the new *regionalism* → emergence of a series of dense nodes of human labour/communal life (Scott, 2002)  
nodes → distinctive sub-national (i.e. regional) social and spatial formations

referred to as *global city regions* → propensity of certain types of econ. activity to gather together in dense locational clusters (Agnew et al, 2002)  
quest for mutual proximity due to heightened econ. competition

today – 20 *city regions* in access of 10 million  
clustering → allows for greater operational flexibility/  
enhances innovative capacities

*city regions* – functions as territorial platforms ([])  
groups or networks of firms contesting global markets)

# The Developing World

Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Jakarta, Lagos, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Teheran  
principle [ ]s of advanced econ. activity in their national economies (basing points for > national and transnational companies)

more nuanced approach required in expl. *evolution of hyper-large* urban areas – why? south different from north

Stren (2002) – improved prospects for *city region* formation in the Developing World (DW):

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threshold conditions met · necessary conditions for econ. growth and investment created

↳ enabled through locally-based formal institutions of state

# African Cities

except for SA – African countries manifesting low/negative investment, high/increasing unemployment, political/civil unrest (cities growing rapidly – 5% annual growth in Africa)

three important features:

- increasing informality in economic activity
- declining capacity to provide services and infrastructure
- socially and spatially fragmented

focus on import-substitution, resource processing and primary exports – global marginalisation

also – skewed configuration of national urban system, personal rule, historical legacy, role of the state, *structural adjustment*

National states/aid agencies – pro-rural bias  
Consequences?

# South African Cities

very large cities and very fragmented and polarised structure but balanced hierarchy of cities/towns  
high urbanisation rates ( $\pm 2/3$  of pop. in urban areas within next generation)

Jhb/CT/Dbn – 50% of national GDP (only 30% of national population) → economic hubs

six met. areas + 17 large cities/towns → 80% of GDP  
Jhb/PTA corridor – 0.2% of surface area, 24% of SAs  
GGP growth in 1990s

poverty, inadequate shelter/basic services, sprawl, uneven land use, > gap between rich/poor, poor land/housing markets, spatial fragmentation, displaced urbanisation

exacerbating above – economic liberalisation and *structural adjustment?*

# South African Cities (cont)

because of spatial morphology (and political/historical antecedents) → do not function optimally as econ. entities

need . . . to match economies of urbanisation with new econ. growth sectors → esp. investment in infrastructure & development of skills of local labour markets

policy of city boundary rationalisation (since 1994) → metropolitan economic regions · integration into global economy?

many argue · cities critical to national growth strategy + global integration

economic profiles – Cape Town, Jhb, Durban and Pretoria in paper

# City Regions in S.A.?

“megacity” concept popularised in SA – 2000 municipal elections

aim: city-wide spatial integration, socially inclusive development, equity, social justice, econ. prosperity

reality: re-constitution of cities in political/institutional terms (local polit. integration/representation)

but not: *global city regions* → either using conventional typologies or < econ-determinist ones (Agnew et al 2002; Stren, 2002)

Stren’s (2002) threshold conditions:

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Jhb, CT, Dbn · sub-national social/spatial formations + principal [ ]s of econ. activity in S.A. but ...

global index of city “connectivity” / “world city-ness” →

Jhb = only African city (29/55 in world)

# Johannesburg's Aspirations

“world class” / “globally competitive” city (Beaverstock *et al* 2002) – global accountancy services centre, advert. services centre, corporate banking services centre, finance/business centre, communications, multinationals

newly constituted local leadership – drives urban policy in support of global ambitions  
late 1990s – quintessential professional, private sector city/entrepreneurial leadership

Jhb – displays characteristics of “world urban system” (Soja, 2001)

Conclusion: SA's and Africa's only plausible candidate for world city status



## However:

- Jhb · econ. base in precipitous decline since 1980s (< in traditional manuf. base)
- major demographic shifts → in-migration from townships/immigrants – conflict → space/resources/jobs
- massive capital flight from cities → deindustrialisation (business, account., advertising)
- Jhb – national head office function however maintained (life assurance/banking institutions) – continue investments in property
- spectacular growth in informal sector · rapid transformation in inner city area
- 2 responses to “competing” interpretations:

- *“The City of Johannesburg is a city of the future, a city of the 21st century, a city of the 21st century.”*
- *“The City of Johannesburg is a city of the past, a city of the past, a city of the past.”*

# SAs Best "Global" Prospect

Jhb – still SA's most globally competitive urban prospect  
threshold conditions met = necessary conditions for econ. growth/investment created

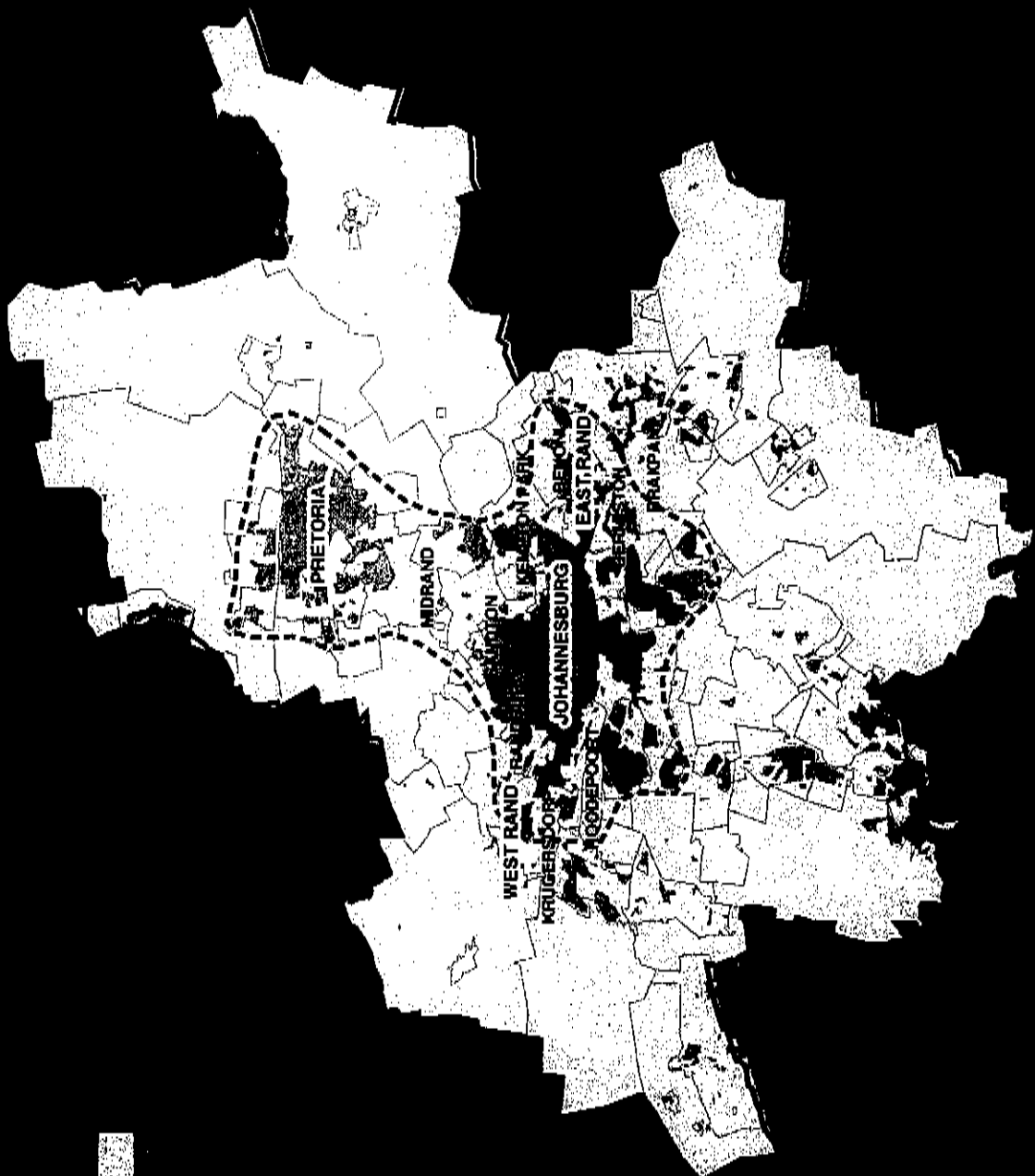
Jhb, however → not "global city region" (i.t.o. definitions/classifications)

Urban Heart of Gauteng (UHG), however → dense network of sub-national social/spatial formations – also, principal [ ] of advanced econ. activity and platform for ... SA's most formidable *global city region prospect*

UHG = east/west – north/south axis (Jhb/PTA/E. Rand/W. Rand) – 11 million people

Jhb-Pretoria corridor – 0.2% of surface area, 24% of SAs GGP growth in 1990s

Gauteng – 1.4% of surface area – 48% of SAs GDP & 60% of fiscal revenue; 9% of Africa's GDP



PRETORIA

MIDRAND

WEST RAND

KRUGERSDORP

JOHANNESBURG

BENONI

EAST RAND

BERENSON

FRANCA

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# SAs Best "Global" Prospect (cont)

Blue IQ = UHG's "unique" SDI → econ. infrastructure development programme of province recognising propensity of econ. activity to gather together in dense locational clusters:

- innovations – led industry
- financial and business services (incl. "business" tourism)
- value-added high-tech manufacturing

11 economic zones – SA's "smart centre" → based on:

- inherent economic capabilities
- infrastructure
- government support

Blue IQ potential:

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geog.-bounded Blue IQ region → SA's *city region*? → sustainable programme of spatial development based on economic potential?



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# Conclusion

cross-sectional corridor in Gauteng · emerging *global city* region?

global city status pre-occupation in formulaic sense:

- ↳ limitations on new 'imaginings'
- ↳ lack of creative city formulations / alternative paths
- ↳ failure to recognise cities as diverse, creative, distinct

new/alternate formulations :

- ↳ Storper's (2002) reflexive city.
- ↳ "cities as overlapping spheres of reflexive economic action"
- ↳ Amin and Graham (1997)
- ↳ cities as "multiple spaces, times and webs of relations"
- ↳ Robinson's (2002) 'ordinary city'
- ↳ cities as "diverse, creative, modern and distinctive"

possible city futures · social inclusivity / economic growth  
realignment of local development strategies needed  
NEPAD and African Union imperatives too!

